



## CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

### DIRECTIVE NO. 06-1

# Protecting the Forests of the Chesapeake Watershed

Retaining and expanding forests in the Chesapeake Bay watershed is critical to our success in restoring the Chesapeake Bay. Forests are the most beneficial land use for protecting water quality, due to their ability to capture, filter and retain water, as well as absorb pollution from the air. In fact, our watershed forests are excellent assimilators of air pollution, retaining up to 85 percent of the nitrogen they receive from air emission sources such as motor vehicles and electric utilities. Conversely, a reduction in forest area leads to a disproportionate increase in nitrogen loads to our waterways. Forests are also essential to the provision of clean drinking water to over 10 million residents of the watershed and provide valuable ecological services and economic benefits including carbon sequestration, flood control, wildlife habitat, and forest products.

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is currently 58 percent forested and contains some of the most extensive hardwood forests in the world's temperate latitudes. But we are currently losing forest land at a rate of 100 acres per day and over 750,000 acres of forest have been converted to urban and suburban development since 1982. *The State of Chesapeake Forests* report estimates that of the region's private forests vulnerable to development 5.5 million acres are among the most

valuable for protecting water quality. Further, the report recognizes that more proactive stewardship of public and private forest lands is needed in order to sustain the many benefits they provide to the Bay watershed and its residents. We, the Chesapeake Executive Council, applaud the comprehensive work reflected in *The State of Chesapeake Forests* and consider its findings to be compelling.

In *Chesapeake 2000*, we committed to "Permanently preserve from development 20 percent of the land area in the watershed by 2010" and "Conserve existing forests along all streams and shorelines." Further, we committed to expand urban tree canopy and link forests with stormwater management. Our land conservation efforts to date, which have been extremely successful, have not significantly targeted forest lands. We have tools, such as the Resource Lands Assessment called for in *Chesapeake 2000*, that can identify priority forest lands with the greatest impact on watershed function and water quality. In recognition of the unique and irreplaceable functions of urban and rural forests to the health, well-being and livelihood of the citizens of the watershed, we must look beyond traditional programs and act now to accelerate the conservation and stewardship of our most valuable forests.



HEREFORE, WE COMMIT to developing a collective goal to be adopted by the Executive Council in 2007 for conserving those forest lands in the Bay watershed where conservation to protect water quality is most needed. To achieve this commitment, we agree to:

- Use the best available tools, such as the Resource Lands Assessment, to identify areas where retention and expansion of forests is most needed to protect water quality in the Bay watershed. Priority areas include:
  - Stream, shoreline, and floodplain forests and forested wetlands;
  - Forests in headwaters and on steep slopes;
  - Forests protecting drinking water supplies;
  - Large contiguous blocks of forest; and
  - Sustainably managed working forests.

- Identify and recommend ways that planning, regulations, easements, tax incentives, funding programs, and other strategies will be used to ensure the protection of these important forest lands, slow forest loss and enhance needed stewardship.
- Expand efforts to link stormwater management and land use regulations with conservation of forests and riparian buffers.
- Develop within each State and the District of Columbia a goal, framework, and milestones for protecting forested areas of critical importance to water quality (in acres or percentage of forested lands) while considering which of those are most vulnerable to development.
- Work collaboratively with landowners, forest product industries, land trusts, watershed organizations, and other business partners, to create new partnerships, and develop innovative actions, programs, and incentives to support retention, expansion, and stewardship of forest lands of critical importance to water quality.

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CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

FOR THE STATE OF MARYLAND



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